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### Deposited in DRO:

29 February 2016

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Sugg, R. (2016) 'Lessons from the body : practices of dissection and anatomy.', in The Cambridge guide to the worlds of Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 802-810.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/literature/renaissance-and-early-modern-literature/cambridge-guide-worlds-shakespeare?format=WX>

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1.11.06. LESSONS FROM THE BODY: PRACTICES OF DISSECTION AND ANATOMY.  
Edited by Aimara 07-02-2011

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Rediscovering the body

For most of our lives, we live at once inside and outside of our bodies: inside, because we are never anywhere else from cradle to grave, yet outside, because their inner wonders remain hidden from us in the ordinary experience of everyday life. At certain points in history, the inner body breaks this cosy bargain, thrusts itself out of obscurity, and demands that we stand and wonder at something which is at once utterly familiar and radically strange. Such a moment occurred in our own lifetimes, when Gunther von Hagens' *Bodyworlds* exhibition rapidly became the most successful special exhibition of all time in the years after its premiere, at Mannheim in 1997. When I wandered the hushed lamplit galleries at Brick Lane, on chill evenings in February 2003, hours before the show fled the country under a hail of controversy and threatened legal action, I felt a sense of wonder which is usually reserved only for children. Those who I interviewed in and outside the galleries seemed to feel the same

Almost five hundred years earlier, the human body had been encouraged to break that workaday bargain by a range of pioneering anatomists, surgeons and artists. From the relatively crude but dramatically vibrant images of Berengario da Carpi in 1521 [See **web illustr:** *Murder after Death*, 81], through to the first spare educational drawings of Vesalius in 1538, and on to the give us information about monumental *De Fabrica Corporis Humani* of 1543, [ILLUSTRS.\*]woodcutters and dissectors vigorously and painstakingly cut out the breathtaking spectacles of God's ultimate masterpiece and thrust them before the startled eyes of an ever-widening public.

\* Print illustr: Ecorché: Bridgeman art library, CHT 213275.

Web illustr: Nerve figure: *Murder after Death*, 86.

<**FOR ONLINE EDITION:** from scientific revolution to linguistics: “analysis and “anatomy”>

Britain was relatively slow to catch the fullest effects of this new anatomical and scientific revolution. In the 1580s, physicians were still evidently lax in their attendance at, or execution of, their own prestigious new Lumleian anatomy lectures. Yet even by this stage more sharp-witted writers had begun to exploit the rhetorical and intellectual possibilities which sprang from public dissections and anatomy textbooks. Along with innumerable usages in drama, poetry, sermons and polemic, we find that in the years up to 1650 there appeared at least 120 literary anatomies, and over eighty titles carrying the then common dissective synonyms 'lay open' and 'rip'. The whole formal habit of 'sectioning' up books also appears to derive from this newly re-embodied mode of thought. The OED's first use of the term, in 1559, is: 'the anatomy or section of any beast'; whilst its first use as describing 'a subdivision of a written or printed work' comes from 1576 (the year in which the first English literary anatomies were published). In the following year books began to advertise themselves as having sections, with fifty such native works appearing by 1650. Come 1621 that arch-linguist and arch-literary-dissector, Robert Burton, could knowingly pun, at the close of his obsessively sectioned and subsectioned *Anatomy of Melancholy*: 'the last section shall be mine, to cut the strings of Democritus' visor, to unmask and show him as he is...'.

In the early twenty-first century the rhetoric of anatomy is still with us. If I could patent one single intellectual catchword of recent years, it would be 'analysis'. This term is not only immensely popular, but still has considerable authority. It is somehow the last word, the unsparing, unflinching, perhaps sharply unsentimental exposure of the basic truths behind any question. As this description already suggests, the term is closely related to 'anatomy'. Linguistically, it is Greek in origin, unlike the Latinate 'anatomy'. Yet the two words both emphasise an active process of division ('to break down' or 'undo' in the case of 'analysis') and were used synonymously during the first wave of English anatomical rhetoric. Again, at least twenty three vernacular 'analyses' of various subjects were printed in the years between 1585 and 1650.

#### Anatomical specimens: dead and living

Shakespeare's uses of anatomy can be broadly divided into those emphasising the dissected body as an entity, and those which transfer the skills of the anatomist into the realm of oral or literary rhetoric. Whilst the first class is arguably simpler, certain interesting ambiguities appear on closer

inspection. In act three, scene four of *King John*, for example, Constance, grown increasingly distraught after her son Arthur is taken prisoner in battle, insists:

... I defy all counsel, all redress,  
But that which ends all counsel, true redress,  
Death! Death, O amiable lovely death!  
Thou odoriferous stench, sound rottenness,  
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,  
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,  
And I will kiss thy detestable bones,  
And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows  
And ring these fingers with thy household worms,  
And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust,  
And be a carrion monster like thyself:

Deaf to Philip's 'O fair affliction, peace', she continues:

No, no, I will not, having breath to cry.  
O, that my tongue were in the thunder's mouth;  
Then with a passion would I shake the world,  
And rouse from sleep that fell anatomy  
Which cannot hear a lady's feeble voice ...

(3.4, 23-41)

The preceding lines make it obvious enough that this 'fell anatomy' is a personification of death. It is possible that by this Shakespeare meant just a skeleton. But it is also possible that he had in mind the kind of hybrid death-figure which anatomical demonstrations and textbooks promoted around this time. Surviving data suggests that 'anatomy' was probably used more commonly than 'skeleton' to denote 'the bones or bony framework'. The OED gives a first instance of the latter term only from 1578, and for some time after, those who employ this word tend to gloss it as something novel (as the anatomist Helkiah Crooke, in 1615, and John Donne, in a sermon

delivered some time after that year). Moreover, both 'anatomy' and 'skeleton' were often qualified by adjectives - as in 'bare anatomy', 'bare skeleton', or 'dry skeleton' - in ways which show the single words themselves to have been ambiguous.

<**FOR ONLINE EDITION: Shakespeare's hybrid images and meanings of "anatomy"**>

Potentially, then, a 'fell anatomy' could be a kind of hybrid death figure, conjuring various images into the minds of different audience members. Some might imagine a 'transi', the half-rotten death figure of early-modern funeral art [**Web illustr**]<sup>i</sup> others a Vesalian écorché; and others - who by 1597 could have seen one of the spectacular three-day Lumleian anatomies held by the physicians - may well have recalled the stripped and eviscerated felon's corpse of the dissection table. These kinds of images could well have arisen independently of surrounding textual detail, given the invasive force of anatomy as image and rhetoric at this time. But they may also be implied by the text itself. Although Constance talks openly of 'bones', and projects her eyeballs into those of a skull, she also refers to the kind of 'odoriferous stench' which would better suit a partially-clothed corpse than a dry skeleton. And, when she imagines Death as 'a carrion monster' it is hard to be sure whether she means 'a monster which feeds on carrion', or 'a monster which provides carrion' for scavengers (or even both). 'Carrion' itself probably derives from 'caro', meaning 'flesh', and 'monster' in early-modern usage often had the quite precise sense of a distinctly hybrid natural aberration - something which, in this case, might seem to unnervingly straddle the line between living body and dry bones.

Shakespeare's other use of 'anatomy' as an entity occurred earlier, and more obviously crosses the line between living and dead. In act five of *The Comedy of Errors* Antipholus of Ephesus outlines his tribulations, detailing how, as he took the arresting officer to his house,

By the way we met  
My wife, her sister, and a rabble more  
Of vile confederates. Along with them  
They brought one Pinch, a hungry, lean-faced villain,  
A mere anatomy, a mountebank,  
A threadbare juggler and a fortune-teller,  
A needy, hollow-eyed, sharp-looking wretch,

A living dead man. This pernicious slave,  
Forsooth, took on him as a conjurer,  
And gazing in mine eyes, feeling my pulse,  
And with no face, as 'twere, outfacing me,  
Cries out, I was possessed.

(5.1, 235-46)

At the broadest level, this offers the suitably-named 'Pinch' as a kind of 'living anatomy' (compare Starveling, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Such phrases often referred to someone emaciated by disease or hunger - as when Massinger, in *The Picture* (1629) ([See 1.13. Shakespeare's Fellows](#)) has the thinly-dieted Hilario approached by a surgeon, asking if he would sell himself, 'To make said he a living anatomy/And set thee up in our hall, for thou art transparent/Without dissection...' (4.1, 12-16). At this level alone, if we take only the later possible date of 1594 for composition of *Errors* (the earliest being 1590), Shakespeare already looks quite adroit: few other writers seem to have used this sense so early on in English literature. (One exception is the typically sharp-witted and streetwise Thomas Nashe ([See 1.13. Shakespeare's Fellows](#)), [link](#) who in 1590 derides those literary hacks who 'vaunt the pride of contraction'. Like the starving Scythians, who 'took in their girdles shorter', such writers are able to 'bound their base humours in the beggerly straights of a hungry analysis' – the last word here playing off 'anatomy' as both 'literary abridgement' and 'anatomised body'.)

We should be open to the possibility that Shakespeare himself saw one of the two Lumleian dissections which evidently took place in London in 1589 and 1592. But we do not need to prove this to see how deft and how avant-garde he is in these lines. They imply, first, that Pinch's 'needy' and 'hungry' appearance are a proof of his dubious, fraudulent status. If his skills were genuine and effective, he would of course not be so destitute. Second, given that he is 'a mountebank', and that Adriana's 'Doctor Pinch' seems to relate to this rather than to the role of 'schoolmaster', we appear also to meet an early case of negative association between medical personnel and the still novel arts of dissection - one sharply amplified by Webster, when in *The Duchess of Malfi* he has Ferdinand 'throw ... [the] doctor down and beat him', vowing: 'I will stamp him into a cullis: Flay off his skin, to cover one of the an[a]tomies, this rogue hath set ... in Barber-Chirurgeons hall'

(5.2, 75-79) (See 1.13. Shakespeare's Fellows).

A third possibility is most interesting of all. Whilst Shakespeare here uses 'mere anatomy' as a socially derisive label, he may well have inspired a later tendency to employ it as a marker of spiritual or moral degradation. Thus the preacher Thomas Adams talks, in 1615, of 'the meagre ghost of malice, her blood drunk up, the marrow of her bones wasted, her whole body like a mere anatomy'. This notion of spiritual failings literally eating away the flesh seems most commonly to have been associated with usurers: again by Adams, and memorably by Thomas Dekker, in 1606, (See 1.13. Shakespeare's Fellows) when he depicts a new arrival at the gates of hell: 'the Barber Surgeons had begged the body of a man at a Sessions to make an anatomy, and that anatomy this wretched creature begged of them to make him a body'. Lest we should doubt the nature of cause and effect in such cases of spiritual poverty, we might heed the poet Wye Saltonstall, who in 1631 portrays the usurer as one whose 'pining covetous thoughts eat ... off his flesh from his body', making him look 'like a living anatomy'.

#### Epitomes and mapping

Shakespeare's other uses of anatomy are those which play off the increasingly popular intellectual or artistic senses of the term: either as a form of painstaking, rigorous, in-depth exposure of truth, or in the sense of epitome. Turning to an example of this latter usage in *The Rape of Lucrece*, we meet a notable irony: where 'mere anatomies' such as Pinch or the usurer are despised for their state of physical reduction, the imputedly 'essential compression' of anatomy has a powerful cachet when employed more abstractly. With Lucrece finding a certain bleak catharsis in a famously convincing painting of the agonised Hecuba ('Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,/Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies'), we are told:

In her the painter had anatomised  
Time's ruin, beauty's rack, and grim care's reign:  
Her cheeks with chops and wrinkles were disguised;  
Of what she was no semblance did remain.  
Her blue blood changed to black in every vein,  
Wanting the spring that those shrunk pipes had fed,

Showed life imprisoned in a body dead.

(1448-56)

Taken alone, these lines present us with a fairly typical (and again fairly early) example of anatomy as a figure for essential compression. 'Anatomized' has in part the senses of 'cut up', 'investigated', and 'delineated', but above all the sense of 'distilled'. By using anatomy to convey this kind of essential outline or epitome, Shakespeare may also be spinning readers on a deft pivot between time and space: the oft-vaunted depth of the anatomy (actual and literary) can effectively stand in for the dimension of '*time's* ruin' in a way that 'distilled' or 'mirrored' could not.

If we move beyond the passage itself, we further realise that the painter's 'anatomy' is indeed broadly interchangeable with terms such as 'mirror' and 'map'. In *Lucrece* alone we have two examples. Lying unaware of Tarquin's voyeuristic lusts as she sleeps, Lucrece - whose hair 'like golden threads, play'd with her breath' - shows 'life's triumph in the map of death' (400-402). That is, her breath triumphs over the 'map of death', which seems essentially to mean sleep, as 'death in miniature' (and perhaps, also, a kind of two-dimensional, paper image of the more profound, eternal reality). Again, just before her suicide, those around Lucrece see her 'with a joyless smile', turning away

The face, that map which deep impression bears  
Of hard misfortune, carved in it with tears.

(1711-13)

Something very similar had already been seen, come 1593-4, in *Titus Andronicus*, where Lavinia stood as 'the map of woe' (3.2, 12), and Shakespeare was also fond of the phrase 'map of honour' (*Richard II*, 5.1, 12; *Henry VI Pt II*, 3.1, 203); whilst a reworked version of the Lucretian facial map is central to Sonnet 68. In *Henry VIII*, meanwhile, Buckingham is described as 'the mirror of all courtesy', in a phrase where 'anatomy' or 'map' could quite easily be substituted. (2.1, 53).

Casting a wider view, we find that readers who picked up copies of *Henry IV* or *Romeo and Juliet* at book-stalls in the late nineties might equally have handled now forgotten works such as Anthony Munday's 1588 translation of the romance *Palmerin de Oliva*, whose subtitle claimed to



show 'the mirror of nobility, the map of honour, [and] anatomy of rare fortunes...'. Similarly, the anonymous *A Mirror for English Soldiers* (1596) hedged its rhetorical bets by tagging 'or, an Anatomy of Accomplished Man at Arms' onto the title-page; while in the same year Walter Raleigh, claiming to have 'anatomized the rest of the sea towns as well of Nicaragua, Jucata, Nueva Espanna, and the islands...' notably transposes anatomy, as a byword for thoroughness of description, to an area where 'mapped' would have seemed an especially obvious term.

As those first two examples indicate, writers or publishers could use such terms with more opportunism than stylistic rigour. Equally, they could add the 'anatomy' tag to a reprint of an existing work to catch attention, or drop it from a title-page for similar reasons. One or two of Shakespeare's anatomical moments are arguably more modish than integral. In *As You Like It*, Jacques claims:

He that a fool doth very wisely hit  
Doth very foolishly, although he smart,  
Not to seem senseless of the bob; if not,  
The wise man's folly is anatomiz'd  
Even by the squand'ring glances of the fool.

(2.7, 53-7)

These lines probably made more sense to audiences of the very late Elizabethan and early Stuart periods than they do to modern ones: many people could know what Jacques meant merely by transferring examples from other contexts. Those who liked to probe language a little more deeply might also have appreciated the implied violence and injury ('although he smart') and the associated sense of 'exposed' - folly as laid open or laid bare. Even so, this is one of Shakespeare's more casual uses of dissection (compare, also, *All's Well* ('I would gladly have him see his company anatomised,/that he might take a measure/of his own judgements...' (4.3, 26-8)) where the reference to measurement adds a certain edge of precision).

The same can be said of Rumour in *Henry IV Pt2*, when he, after describing himself at length, wonders

... But what need I thus  
My well-known body to anatomize  
Among my household?

(Induction, 20-22)

Perhaps the most interesting feature of this is its gesture toward the tradition of self-anatomy - something vividly captured in this **image**\* from Juan de Valverde's 1556 textbook, *Historia de la Composición del Cuerpo Humano*, and echoed frequently by those rigorously introspective Christians (especially Protestants) who subjected themselves to unflinching and in-depth examinations of personal behaviour, conscience, and the inner man or woman per se.

[\* Bridgeman art library: CHT 213246]

Like certain other literary anatomists of his day, Shakespeare is at times caught up in the novel excitement of this new art and its associated rhetoric. In such cases, anatomy writes the author, rather than vice versa. But for the most part he, like the more astute readers and writers of the age, is well aware of the various possibilities which dissection offers, as well as of how it differs from 'mirror' imagery (it has more depth, more active intervention, and arguably more sensuous immediacy or shock value) or from rhetorical mapping (which is also active and creative, but both flat, and relatively schematic or abstract in its mode of replication). Moreover, in both comedies and tragedies, Shakespeare deploys dissective rhetoric in ways which push the boundaries of this new form (compare, especially, Donne), which implicitly question the blunter rhetoric of certain fellow-writers, and which at times fuse anatomy with the irreducible drama of human life *in extremis*.

#### Anatomizing others

In the opening scene of *As You Like It*, Oliver learns from the wrestler, Charles, that Orlando is due to fight with the champion on the following day. The older brother now proceeds to warn Charles about his brother's true character:

... I'll tell thee,  
Charles, it is the stubbornest young fellow of France; full of  
ambition, an envious emulator of every man's good parts, a secret  
and villainous contriver against me his natural brother.

Therefore use thy discretion: I had as lief thou didst break his neck as his finger. And thou wert best look to't; for if thou dost him any slight disgrace, or if he do not mightily grace himself on thee, he will practise against thee by poison, entrap thee by some treacherous device, and never leave thee till he hath ta'en thy life by some indirect means or other; for, I assure thee, and almost with tears I speak it, there is not one so young and so villainous this day living. I speak but brotherly of him; but should I anatomize him to thee as he is, I must blush and weep, and thou must look pale and wonder.

(1.1, 111-123)

To fully understand the artful nuances of these lines we need to remind ourselves of the habits of literary anatomists in Shakespeare's time. These could, as noted, be opportunistic and relatively loose in their rhetorical thrust. But they could also be deadly serious: from the very opening of the new genre, the literary anatomy was often ferociously polemical. And, given the era, most polemics were more or less religious ones (**See 1.10. Religion**). The very first surviving English title of this kind is a translation of Augusto Mainardi's *Anatomy of the Mass* (1556), and just a few years after *As You Like It* there appears Thomas Bell's *Anatomy of Popish Tyranny* (1603). But perhaps the most interesting titles for our purpose are Philip Stubbes's 1583 *Anatomy of Abuses*, with its notorious attacks on the immorality of theatre, and the now far more obscure *Anatomy of the Controverted Ceremonies of the Church of England* (1618), by the Puritan minister John Sprint.

Stubbes's views are radically opposed to Shakespearean drama not just because he would, if able, annihilate all theatre per se, but because, more basically, he refuses to acknowledge the nature or value of drama. Like the hopelessly deluded Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, his impossibly black and white views of truth and of human nature are sharply opposed to that dynamic celebration of human complexities which galvanises so much of Shakespeare's work. How does Sprint fit in? Those familiar with Robert Burton's 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy* may recognise in **this illustration\*** the 'skeletal' contents pages of that more famous literary dissection. It has been plausibly argued by some critics that these prefatory outline charts *are*, in one important sense, Burton's *Anatomy*. That is: they are the skeletal framework from which the

whole vast body of Burton's sprawling discussion is constructed. Despite the notorious additions to this work in successive editions, that bony foundation remains constant, and can in theory be recovered if one pares away the accretions of flesh (some might say fat...) which overlie it.

\* **Print illust:** Early English Books Online: *A true, modest, and Just defence of the petition for reformation* (1618) image 29.

Burton may well have taken the idea from Sprint (the two men were both at Christ Church, Oxford, around the turn of the century). But what concerns us is here is that Sprint's four skeletal pages are in fact *not* a preface. Rather, they *are* the Anatomy; there is no directly linked text following the charts. By using this technique, Sprint offers the most extreme version of a technique which is integral to all anatomical polemic. He is not subjectively arguing against his opponents, but objectively laying open the true body of the issue. Just because this tactic is so often undeclared, it can be all the more effective for some readers. It works by implicitly positing a *limited* body of truth; so that, once this body has been cut up and laid bare with sufficient rigour, the argument is ended with a kind of *quod erat demonstrandum* flourish. It may seem obvious enough to us that this is in reality a subjective intellectual strategy. If so, we should bear in mind that we ourselves are still prone to read newspaper 'Analysis' columns with an implicit sense of 'we've heard the opinions; now let's hear the analysis', the latter arguably shading into 'now let's hear the truth'. Many early-modern thinkers probably had their own particular reasons for accepting the authority of literary anatomists. First, the human body itself was a literally god-given entity. And second, for more severely religious figures, truth was a similarly pre-existent, absolute and objective thing.

Needless to say, such ideology is little use to a dramatist who wants to write something other than a medieval morality play. Looking at Oliver's speech in this light we find an interesting comment on the supposed objectivity of anatomical polemicists. His lines work not just by using dissective rhetoric, but by using it with a falsely filial and sentimental reluctance:

I speak but brotherly  
of him; but should I anatomize him to thee as he is, I must blush  
and weep, and thou must look pale and wonder.

Because he is too personally close, he claims, he cannot achieve the objective distance required to

fully, truly anatomise Orlando. If he could, he would get closer still in terms of ruthless, unflinching exposure, laying bare his brother's hideous character with a demonstrative, objective rigour. In this sense even the slight disjuncture of anticipated responses - Oliver would blush and weep, with the heightened emotion of a brother; perhaps even with a sense of being somehow to blame - works to intensify Oliver's mock-tender facade. Another way of viewing the lines is to say that Oliver, allegedly sacrificing ultimate truth to family feeling, has given a two dimensional picture of vices which he cannot bring himself to anatomise in all their shadowy depth.

At the close of this exchange, with Charles departed, Oliver states of his brother: 'I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why,/Hates nothing more than he' (1.1, 127-9). We may see this as a lighter adumbration of Iago, with his oft-noted lack of motivation for his hatred of Othello - famously summed up in Coleridge's 'motiveless malignancy'. In present context, it is particularly interesting because it can be seen to further undermine Oliver's wily claims to at once *know* the objective truth, and shrink from fully revealing it. In fact, whilst failing to really understand his brother, he also fails to know himself, with his inability to explain his own hostility being one example of this inadequate self-knowledge. Thus one implicit motto of those lines - anatomise yourself thoroughly before you presume to anatomise others - can be applied not only to Oliver, but to certain of the self-righteous, psychologically confused Puritan polemicists of the day too. To both, the medical anatomists might repeat the Latin phrase which was indeed sometimes used alongside pictorial self-dissections: 'Nosce Teipsum' - know thyself.

Does anyone have the right to fully anatomise anyone else? Is this kind of psycho-moral dissection in fact more impious, in its godlike hubris (compare too, the famous 'judge not, lest ye be judged' behind *Measure for Measure*) than those mutilations of criminal bodies by which physicians sought to advance the scope of practical knowledge? One character who seems to arrogate this moral right to himself is the distinctly anti-Puritan figure of Sir Toby Belch. Around midway through *Twelfth Night*, Toby sets afoot his ploy to have Andrew Aguecheek challenge Viola/Cesario to a duel. Having coaxed Andrew into writing a letter to his antagonist, he tells Fabian:

... and by all means stir on the youth to  
an answer. I think oxen and wainropes cannot hale them together.

For Andrew, if he were opened and you find so much blood in his liver as  
will clog the foot of a flea, I'll eat the rest of th'anatomy.

(3.2, 46-9)

These last lines are so delightfully comic that we are in danger of overlooking the remarkably aggressive psychology behind them. In terms of anatomy, we find Oliver's rhetoric of inner depths given a violently corporeal wrench - almost literally so, as though Toby rips apart the skin and muscle, and flourishes the supposedly absolute physical proof of Andrew's cowardice before our eyes. Yet the violence does not end there. If he were *disproved*, Toby insists, he would indeed 'eat the rest of th'anatomy'.

For all the offhanded whimsy of the delivery, and the broadly comic vehicle framing it, this is, finally, a cannibalistic gesture. Like other curious men and women of his day, Shakespeare probably knew - via Montaigne amongst other sources - not only that the cannibals did 'each other eat' (*Othello*), but why they did so. Indeed, although New World cannibals often ate their own dead tribes-members in pious, consensual funeral rituals, the commonest reason in Old World commentaries was the psychology of aggressive- (or endo-) cannibalism. They ate their enemies to terrorise them. They did so because this was a time-honoured custom amongst certain enemy tribes - most notably, in Canada or Brazil.

In Shakespeare's day, versions of this kind of tribal hostility and violence were most commonly found amongst the genteel and the aristocracy. Although they rarely stretched to cannibalism, they could be almost as ferociously invasive. What does this say about Toby's role as an anatomist of character? If we take the anatomy alone, and compare it to that of Oliver, we can plausibly argue that Toby at least knows himself better than Oliver (or Angelo, or the famously deluded Malvolio). In the often whitewashed views of early-modern history, it can be too easily forgotten that most of the men in privileged social classes were intrinsically violent. Violence, or the threat of it, were honourable things, things to be proud of. A reputation had to be defended, and physically if need be. In this sense, Toby seems to know himself well enough. When necessary, he can fight for the right to his social status, and shrug off corresponding damage quite airily: 'That's all one. H'as hurt me, and there's th'end on't' (5.1, 182) he says when wounded by Sebastian. Andrew, injured in the same skirmish, complains loudly and demands a surgeon,

having already displayed considerable cowardice in preceding scenes.

What we seem to find, then, is that the superficially comic boast of interior knowledge and cannibalistic consumption encodes, ultimately, a quite basic social antagonism. To Toby, Andrew is a kind of upstart parvenu, a mere carpet knight who lacks male aggressive substance. For all Toby's aggression, there may be a certain basic accuracy in what he says: I know him inside out, and I could easily swallow someone so two-dimensional. Where Oliver hints at depths which he has not probed in himself, Toby speaks from a position of secure self knowledge, and of an interior which is notably shallow.

For all that, some readers or viewers might be forgiven for feeling uncomfortable about Toby's duplicity. He acts as something of a friend to Andrew - even allowing for the probably colder 'friendships' of the time - and undercover of this role feeds off him for money: 'I have been dear to him, lad, some two thousand strong, or so' (3.2, 44). We might say, then, that he has indeed been eating Andrew all along. Not only that, but he at least partially resembles Oliver, insofar as he fakes some degree of emotional attachment, whilst coolly anatomizing his friend behind his back.

#### Lear and Romeo

Then let them anatomise Regan; see what  
breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature  
that makes these hard hearts?

(3.6, 76-78)

This last question, voiced by Lear during the 'interrogation' of Goneril and Regan in the farmhouse, was neither merely rhetorical, nor merely distracted. As I have emphasised elsewhere, William Harvey - among others - was quite ready to make a direct link between temperament and the hardness or softness of the human heart. Whilst he did not imply that the former caused the latter, that further step would not have been a great or peculiar one for many educated people of the day. It would indeed broadly echo the kind of spiritual emaciation posited by Adams and others, in those whose evil morals had supposedly eaten away at their bodies. In the present case, Lear himself makes a similar kind of link just before the anatomy speech, when he clearly reasons

from Regan's (supposed) outer appearance to her inner condition:

And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim  
What store her heart is made on.

(3.6, 53-54)

Lear's desire for some kind of interior dissective knowledge of evil is open to various interpretations. On one hand, the circumstances of the speech make it all but impossible not to suspect that edge of willed violence so often found in anatomical polemic - something which needs only the lightest rhetorical touch, given how potent the spectacle of the dissected body is in the popular imagination at this time (compare John Marston's 'I would leave thee as bare as an anatomy at the second viewing'). Yet, when Lear then asks, 'Is there any cause in nature...?' he necessarily counters what could be a purely personal, vengeful wish for violence. Perhaps most obviously, his query implies at least some desire to *depersonalise* her evil state, by opening up the possibility that it is typical of more general natural processes or laws. (Admittedly, if Regan is to be seen as the victim of such laws, the hardness of her heart cannot be caused solely by her own spiritual condition.) More subtly, between 'her heart.' and 'Is there...', lies an unspoken but very typical assumption of both medical and literary dissection, c.1608: the action may allow us to answer that following question. Such violence is justified, finally, because of its ultimate motivation: the integrity of one individual is sacrificed to advance general knowledge, and the general good.

Lear's brief wished-for 'anatomy' is far more open and far less detailed than that of either Oliver or Toby. Yet at the same time there seems to lurk behind it that criterion which many saw as authorising the moral or intellectual findings of the rhetorical anatomist: 'anatomise yourself thoroughly before you presume to anatomise others'. Arguably, Lear has already done this. In the storm scene of 3.4, he first admits that he, as monarch, has 'ta'en too little care of this' (32-33), failing to realise the sufferings to which men such as Poor Tom could be exposed by a combination of severe poverty and severe weather. And he more generally implies that his own suffering, along with the more immediate buffeting of wind and rain, has indeed anatomised him. The raw drama of human experience has pared him down, by this stage, to a keen sense of the basic fragility which he ultimately shares with the lowest of his subjects. From this, it is the



briefest step to that unforgettable gestalt shift, by which Lear deftly inverts his previous sense of normality:

Ha! Here's three  
on's are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself;  
unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked  
animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton  
here.

(3.4, 105-109)

At the start of the play, Lear was a man so heavily encased in the artificial layers of social convention that he could not even achieve a genuine moment of contact with his favoured daughter. Still later, he failed to realise that these were conventions, and that by shedding them off he left himself open to a changed state of power and of mind. Yet by the time he speaks those words in reference to Edgar, the knife-edge of the play has flayed him down to a condition in which he not only recognises his kinship with the lowest beggar, but then willingly anatomises the last thin layers surrounding that bare stark atom of truth - 'the thing itself' - with his stripping of his clothes: 'Off, off, you lendings!'). We may well feel, then, that he has earned the right to anatomise others in following scenes.

Romeo's moment of anatomical drama is in some ways very different, yet marked finally by an underlying similarity. Its particular context and motivation, first, concern the tragedy's central problem of social division, and Romeo's consequent preoccupation with the names which mark that feud. In Act three, scene three, a heated discussion between Romeo and Friar Laurence is interrupted by the nurse, who comes to tell them of Juliet's anguish at Tybalt's death:

O, she says nothing, sir, but weeps and weeps,  
And now falls on her bed, and then starts up,  
And Tybalt calls, and then on Romeo cries,  
And then down falls again.

Romeo here bursts out:

As if that name,  
Shot from the deadly level of a gun,  
Did murder her; as that name's cursèd hand  
Murdered her kinsman. O, tell me, friar, tell me,  
In what vile part of this anatomy  
Doth my name lodge? Tell me, that I may sack  
The hateful mansion.  
*[He offers to stab himself, and nurse snatches the dagger away]*

(3.3, 99-108)

Once again, diverse threads are inextricably knotted into this brief speech. Repeating 'name' three times in these lines, Romeo not only signals his increasingly wild despair at the tyrannical power of his and Juliet's different family labels, but also emphasises the irony of such power ('as if that name...'), as well as implicitly detaching his actions from the name which in part dictates them ('as that name's cursed hand/Murder'd her kinsman'). He then threatens to use the famed directness of an Alexander, cutting the Gordian knot which he imagines to lie within him, binding him as a person to the constrictive ties of family identity. It is difficult to be sure exactly how serious he is (and this itself could depend to some extent on individual performers, as well as on variant stage directions); but notable all the same that he thus seems like a much more decisive Hamlet, impetuously ready to take arms against a sea of troubles by relocating them beneath his own dagger and own ribs.

How serious is Romeo? For us the 'tears' mentioned by Laurence in following lines might underwrite a genuine emotion. For Laurence himself they are 'womanish' (and thus hysterical, superficial, or misleading), whilst Romeo's 'unreasonable fury' is that of 'a beast' (110-11). Yet Laurence may indeed have been half-consciously galled by the ironic edge of Romeo's question. The distraught lover is at one moment serious about a gesture of suicide which would release him from torment. But is he serious about the possibility of thereby destroying the abstract name which he briefly imagines as a concrete and vulnerable entity within his body? It may rather be that his, 'O tell me friar, tell me...' deliberately harks back to the coldly abstract 'philosophy' (3.3, 55) with which the Friar has sought to comfort him before the nurse's entrance. Its implicit sense

is thus: 'as you seem to know so much...'.

In the long speech which follows Romeo's threatened self-anatomy, Laurence does of course use his wisdom and detachment to dramatically turn the mood of the young Montague from despair to hope. But this sudden pivot does not simply cancel out the emotional drama crackling through the earlier parts of the scene. To Laurence's calm, 'Let me dispute with thee of thy estate', Romeo had responded:

Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel:

Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,

An hour but married, Tybalt murderèd,

Doting like me, and like me banishèd,

Then mightst thou speak ...

(3.3, 64-8)

A very basic truth lies in these lines. Individual feelings are real for those who feel them. As Proust would emphasise much later, the wilder feelings of youth are not merely some inferior stage in the long evolution of the human psyche; rather, they are different, and they have their own truth value.

What unites the youthful agonies of Romeo with the very different passions of the aged Lear? If we recall those anatomical polemicists who genuinely saw themselves cutting down to (or through) essential bodies of truth, we realise that in these two plays especially, Shakespeare provocatively jabs at this kind of aggrandising use of dissection. In the cases of both Romeo and Lear, the brief recourse to anatomy is shadowed by irony: human dramas and human sufferings are so often far more complex, far more irreducible than the immediate physical matter which yields to the surgeon's exploratory knife. Here, at least, anatomy does not offer simple solutions. It reminds us, indeed, of another basic truth which straddles the worlds of medicine and of thought: it is very much easier to cut up and to categorise the dead than it is the living.

As Shakespeare showed with some evident relish in *Measure for Measure*, truth is far from being as black and white as the more fervent Puritans of the day would sometimes claim. Another way

of saying this is to insist that feeling is part of truth, not merely some superficial distraction from it. Thus, in the penultimate couplet of *King Lear* we have Albany's resonant:

The weight of this sad time we must obey,  
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

(5.3, 324-5)

If this in part echoes Romeo's heartfelt, 'Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel', it may remind us, equally, of the special weight of suffering which has earned Lear the right to make his own simple statements both powerful and true. First, in the reconciliation with Cordelia, the seemingly plain words, 'As I am a man, I think this lady/To be my child, Cordelia' (4.7, 67-8) not only enact that newly-felt relationship at the level of syntax, but draw their force from the agonised journey which has led to them. Unlike the anatomists who stand back in false detachment from life, Lear has felt the knife of human experience himself, and in doing so come to a point where - at Cordelia's death - he speaks just one word with heart-wrenching authority:

Thoul't come no more.  
Never, never, never, never, never

(5.3, 308-9)

## Sources Cited

## Additional Sources

Footnote below

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<sup>i</sup> Katharine Park, 'The Life of the Corpse', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50 (1995), 124, Fig.4

